UC SANTA BARBARA

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All Aboard

The wheels on the bus go round and round all right.

At UC Santa Barbara, those wheels spun enough in the most recent academic year for students to rack up 1 million bus rides to or from the campus — a new milestone in the university's ongoing efforts to encourage alternative transportation.

More impressive than the shiny new seven-figure achievement may be the trend it reflects: UCSB has been steadily growing bus ridership via the Santa Barbara Metropolitan Transit District (MTD) for nearly a decade, with 2014-2015 marking a more than 66-percent increase over 2008-2009 levels.

And the numbers are likely to climb even higher.

The campus's long and fruitful partnership with MTD is also resulting in the expansion of two existing lines — 12x and 24x — that run between UCSB and downtown, as well as the creation of a new line altogether. Slated to begin service in fall of 2016, that line will carry riders between campus, Isla Vista and the Camino Real Marketplace at Storke and Hollister Roads.

"Not only do we value transportation but we made an agreement with MTD to expand services to encourage our students to use transit even more than they have in the past," said Marc Fisher, vice chancellor for administrative services at UCSB. "In addition to an increase in student ridership of the bus, we've also seen a drop in the number of cars on campus. We believe students aren't bringing as many cars to the community and we think that's in large part because of the success of transit in

Santa Barbara.

“It’s great in terms of sustainability, and it’s great in terms of reducing parking demand on the campus,” Fisher added. “This is all working toward the environmental goals that we developed with the community. Initially it was the recession that spurred ridership. But also we have really good transportation. That combination over the years helped drive the increase, but this generation seems to be different. Even once the economy started getting better, they didn’t suddenly start bringing cars again. That’s really good news — we’re changing the pattern of use here.”

The campus overall has seen a shift away from single-occupancy vehicles, with biking and walking the top modes of transportation to or from campus. About 10 percent of total campus commuters use the bus on any given day.

That primarily means UCSB students, who pay a quarterly lock-in fee of $13.13 that buys them unlimited rides on MTD.

“All the students pay into the bus program, and over time more and more are finding that it serves their needs,” said James Wagner, manager of UCSB’s Transportation Alternatives Program. “People chose alternatives to driving for all sorts of reasons. Some are all money focused — they want to save money. Some people are into environmental things — they want to reduce their carbon footprint. For other people it’s a mix of all those things.

“Since the recession, people are obviously still going to college, but they’re belt tightening,” he added. “We see less permit sales for cars, but we also see increased bus use. People are affording college but they’re doing it in a different way and part of that is using transit more. We are definitely trending in a good direction.”’

About UC Santa Barbara

The University of California, Santa Barbara is a leading research institution that also provides a comprehensive liberal arts learning experience. Our academic community of faculty, students, and staff is characterized by a culture of interdisciplinary collaboration that is responsive to the needs of our multicultural and global society. All of this takes place within a living and learning environment like no other, as we draw inspiration from the beauty and resources of our extraordinary location at the

edge of the Pacific Ocean.